

This explanation from the Los Angeles Times educational supplement describes programming available to parents and children if they were eventually to be able to use the positive-option feature of the television v-chip.

More than a big screen

Hollywood High School students can move the classroom to the living room.

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It was the same dilemma faced by countless teenagers every day: hundreds of channels, but nothing on TV. But unlike the ones who either opt to watch a rerun for a second time or pop in a DVD, Hollywood High School senior James Garay did something out of the ordinary. He decided to learn, to turn his own free time into an extension of the school day. A new service by his school's New Media Academy made it as easy as sitting in front of the TV. For about a year now, the academy's electronic newsletter has contained a column that features carefully selected lists of recommended television programs, designed specifically to complement and supplement classroom learning. "Our teacher had told us about the information on the website, so I just went online and looked to see what there was to watch," James said. But unlike his uncle's suggestions, which frequently direct the college-bound 17-year-old to PBS, the website contained an up-to-date list of a week's worth of programs, complete with program descriptions, tailored to the in-class learning taking place at Hollywood High School. "I picked the program about Hispanic culture in America and watched it; it was good," James said. "It definitely had a lot to do with our social studies and had a lot of stuff about my heritage as a Hispanic." The program he watched -- Nick News' "Mi America: A Celebration of Hispanic Culture," hosted by award-winning journalist Linda Ellerbee and actor and comedian John Leguizamo -- was chosen specifically to coincide with Hispanic Awareness Month and lessons taking place in school on that same subject. LEARNING IS FUN New Media Academy Director Barbara Gordon, who works with freelance writer and media expert Richard Kahlenberg to compile and post the listings, said that the result is something far greater than just getting kids to watch educational programs. "What we're really doing is extending the school day," Gordon said. "They are looking at this beyond the school day, in their own time, in their choice of location. So what we're doing is allowing them to pursue knowledge on their own time, outside of a classroom." The message is a powerful one: When the school bell rings, learning doesn't end. Gordon and Kahlenberg want the students to know that education is part of their lives and their way of understanding the world around them. The high school's New Media Academy has long operated under the philosophy that the classroom and the world are connected -- especially through the media. For example, students taking part in academy programs use the Internet for research; computer programs such as PowerPoint for creating presentations; and, eight times a year, they attend screenings of classic films at the nearby Egyptian Theater. MAKING IT EASY In order to find programs for the coming week, Kahlenberg often goes to the websites of networks such as the Discovery Channel and NBC, scanning for titles that fit in with current classroom curricula. "The most important thing to note about these program selections is that this is something everyone can do for themselves," Kahlenberg said. "We try to make it easier by doing it for them, but there is a lot of good programming out there and all you have to do is look for it." And every week, he hits the jackpot: Programs on explorations of Alaska's arctic wildlife refuge, understanding electricity, the creation of the

solar system and questions of extraterrestrial life are just a few of the offerings to appear on the list."TV is a public medium and it's a current medium. It has issues of the day presented in a timely fashion," Gordon said. "So we can relate these directly to the content of their social studies or science or math classes. Students just need to be guided and directed toward these particular programs."Students agree."I think it's pretty great," James said. "Sometimes I can watch dumb programs, but when I know about better stuff that's on, sometimes I'm going to want to watch it."
